

No Words by manskinpants

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Summary:

Billy is in Cali for a funeral. Steve is equal parts worried and tired, and everyone knows it. Dustin makes things better. And worse. At the same time.

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Author's Note:

Also posted on tumblr a couple of days ago. Come hang out with me there! -> @bevetm

“Sure thing, Mrs. Henderson. Yeah, no - no, it’s not a problem. I’ll be there. Not at all. Yeah - yeah, you too. Bye.”

It’s already dark when Steve pulls up to the Byers home to pick up Dustin. Though he’s happy to do Mrs Henderson this favor whenever she’s tending to the new Henderson cat’s periodic freakouts (especially because Steve knows *why* the cat has freakouts), he wishes he could have gone straight home today. It’s been a long shift and he’s tired and irritable, not least because Billy’s been in California for four days now, sorting out whatever shit he didn’t want Steve along for, didn’t even want to talk to Steve about, after attending an old friend’s funeral. It’s fine. He’s fine. He’ll call again tonight and he’ll be fine, his laugh a little shaky and his silences a little long but he’s *fine*. He’ll be home soon.

Steve takes a deep breath and sighs it back out. The car is already cooling down as he finally gets out and jogs into the house, letting himself in right after knocking and almost running straight into Joyce.

It’s a full house. From the number of voices shrieking and laughing behind Will’s half-open bedroom door, it sounds like the party’s all there. As Steve stands in the kitchen declining all offers of drinks, snacks, and dinner from a slightly harangued-looking Joyce, Will ambles in and deposits an armful of empty soda cans in the trash.

“Hi, Steve,” Will says, half-lifting a hand in a little wave. “I’ll tell Dustin you’re here.”

“Hey, yeah, thanks. How’s it going?”

Will shrugs, looks away. “You know. Pretty good. Did you talk to Billy? Since he left, I mean?”

Of course he knows. Everyone always knows. Steve scrubs at his hair. "Yeah - yeah, he calls. He says hi to everyone." Billy hadn't.

Will nods seriously. He looks tired, too, but - better. Healthy tired, Steve thinks.

"Cool. El kept talking about him the other day but, uh, she said he's okay. You know, mostly. I guess you probably know. Uh. Anyway - I'll go get Dustin."

"Thanks, kid."

Steve rubs his eyes. Joyce has returned to her slightly frenzied dinner prep, and Steve wonders absently how many of the kids are staying. He decides to leave her to it, heading back into the living room where Nancy is huddling on the sofa with Jonathan. She smiles warmly when he walks in.

"Joyce dragged you into that kitchen so fast I couldn't even say hi. How are you holding up? Are you staying for dinner?"

"I'm - yeah, no, I'm headed straight back. Dustin's mom wants him home."

The "and I want this day to be over" remains unspoken, but Nancy pulls a sympathetic face anyway. "How's Billy?"

"He's, he's okay. You know. Dealing with shit. He calls every night. I mean, he doesn't tell me much. But he calls."

"Good. I'm glad."

"Yeah, well."

Steve can almost feel the energy in the room shift as Dustin bounces in. Probably polished off half of that soda all by himself.

"Steve, my dude!"

Steve frowns. "Yeah, already lost. Brother dude?"

"Uh, *no*, that would obviously be *brude*. My best dude! Which is you.

Also obviously.”

“Yeah, real obvious,” Steve mutters. Dustin has, for inscrutable Dustin reasons, decided that the new thing to do is mash words together. He doesn’t seem to intend it to be annoying - probably thinks it’s cool. But it’s definitely annoying. Steve has no idea what’s going on most of the time.

“Nanceathan! What’s up?” Dustin grins.

“*Nanceathan?*” It’s hard to tell whether Jonathan and Nancy, responding in perfect unison, are more amused or more exasperated.

Steve snorts. “Nanceathan - if they can’t do it, no one can.” He throws up half-hearted jazz hands to go with the lame joke. “Right, dipshit, let’s go. It’s late.”

“Shit, wait, I forgot my plards in the lair.” With that, Dustin sprints off.

“Uh, yeah, okay,” Steve says to the air. “And *lair*? Lounge... chair? Wait. Actual lair. God, this shit messes with my head.”

“So plards is fine?”

Steve rolls his eyes as he turns to Jonathan. “Figured that one out two days ago. Shit, how are you guys? Pretend I asked when I came in.”

Jonathan smiles. “Don’t worry about it. We’re good. Thinking of catching a movie tomorrow night, if you want to come?”

Steve does not want to do anything. If nothing else, Dustin’s timing is impeccable: he jogs back into the room just as Steve opens his mouth and realizes he’s really about to start talking without a decent excuse ready.

“Sorry, my liege,” says Dustin, stuffing some cards into his pocket. “By the way, man, how’s Killy?”

“*Jesus*, Dustin - ”

Dustin throws his hands up, alarmed. "Just King Billy, dude. Chill. I maybe didn't think that through."

"You're gonna want to unlearn that one before he gets back," Steve says, still incredulous.

Dustin nods slowly. "Yep. Yes. I will... do that." He brightens. "So, only a couple more days right? Till, uh, Billy comes back I mean." He waits a beat. "To the Stansion."

Steve sighs, gestures at Dustin to elaborate. "The..."

"The Stilly mansion. Stilly, as in -"

"Okay, Stilly? Dustin? Really? That's terrible."

"It's terrible that *you* can't appreciate linguenius."

Steve just stares at him blankly.

"Harringrove," Nancy offers suddenly, looking up at them from the sofa. She's wearing that quietly pleased look that still makes Steve's chest feel warm and full to bursting.

It takes him a second, but then he feels a small grin pull at his mouth. "Wow, Nance. Nice. That actually sounds like something."

Dustin rolls his eyes. "Yeah, like something overpriced that moms buy."

"No way, man. It sounds nice. I like it."

"Dude, Steve, whatever. You guys aren't smooth enough to be called Harringrove. You're Stilly. Don't shoot the messenger."

"Guys," comes Jonathan's voice from next to Nancy. He's definitely trying not to laugh, and Steve eyes him warily. "Guys. Listen. It's Beve. They're Beve."

"*Oh my God.*" Dustin's hands fly into his hair. "Beve!"

Steve watches, resigned, as laughter overtakes the little shit until he

collapses onto the floor, where he continues to gasp for breath and occasionally utter high-pitched, tearful little “*Beevee!*”s.

Steve waits for him to calm down. It’s not even that funny. Kids are ridiculous and this is ridiculous. As Dustin regains his breath and - somewhat - his composure, Steve catches his eye just as inspiration evidently strikes. Dustin opens his mouth and Steve groans.

“Beve it or leave it. Beve or grieve. Too Beve to believe. You guys - you guys are my pet Beve. Beve achieved!”

“Dustin,” says Steve. He’s so tired. This isn’t funny. Jonathan and Nancy are both cackling. Steve definitely isn’t smiling. He drops his head into his hands, lest that little dipshit see him—okay, smiling, and take it as his cue to continue. “None of that makes any sense.”

“No reprieve from the Beve!”

“Oohh my God. Jesus. Okay, that’s it. We are leaving, and you are never using words again.”

Steve is still grinning when he gets home. To the Stansion.